



The Witchcraft Hysteria in Early Modern Europe: Was Russia an Exception?

Author(s): W. F. Ryan

Source: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (Jan., 1998), pp. 49-84

Published by: the [Modern Humanities Research Association](#) and [University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4212558>

Accessed: 28/08/2013 01:17

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Slavonic and East European Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Witchcraft Hysteria in Early Modern Europe: Was Russia an Exception?

W. F. RYAN

MAGIC and witchcraft in early modern Europe, and in particular the spectacular outbursts of witch persecution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, have been a fashionable subject in recent years. The Russian dimension has been touched on only occasionally, and the few anglophone historians who have mentioned Russia have seized upon two points which appear to make Russia different from other parts of Europe.¹

The first point is that demonic magic (the magic that invokes evil spirits and is performed with their aid), and the demonic pact (the contract whereby the Devil offers magical benefits or powers in return for the magician's soul), were unknown in Russia, and that this is the reason for the relatively small number of Russian witchcraft trials. This contention is untrue, but the reasons why it is untrue are complicated, as I shall explain below.

The second point is that more men than women were tried for witchcraft in Russia. This is strictly true, but the reasons why it is true, and in what sense and to what extent it is true, need further explanation, which I shall also offer below.

I

The reason why several English-language works on witchcraft have declared that the demonic pact was unknown in Russia, and that more men than women were tried in court for witchcraft there, can be stated fairly precisely: they derive from one article on witchcraft trials in seventeenth-century Russia by Russell Zguta in the *American Historical Review* in 1977.² This was a well-informed and well-written article, with

W. F. Ryan is Librarian at the Warburg Institute, University of London.

¹ The most significant are Christina Lerner and Brian Levack, on whom see notes 16 and 17 below. Russian scholars in the Soviet period rarely alluded to the subject, and even more rarely referred to foreign or comparative research.

→ Russell Zguta, 'Witchcraft Trials in Seventeenth-Century Russia' (hereafter 'Witchcraft Trials'), *American Historical Review*, 82, 1977, 5, pp. 1187–207.

a good, if brief, background survey of the pre-seventeenth-century situation, and fairly comprehensive reference to most of the material immediately relevant to the seventeenth century. And since there was for many years no other study of the subject in West European languages, the article gained more or less exclusive authority, and is still regularly quoted.³ The article was, however, rather restricted in its focus; it mentioned, but did not examine, what happened when the seventeenth-century judicial procedures (which could be both accusatory and inquisitorial, or move from one to the other, as in the case of *slovo i delo gosudarevo* proceedings)⁴ were partially replaced by Peter the Great's military law in the early eighteenth century; and it came to conclusions from which the now standard characterization of Russian magic and witchcraft as 'different' can be deduced, although Zguta is not to be blamed for the simplistic use of his article by others. It must also be said, of course, that a good many studies in the history of magic and of witchcraft trials in Western Europe have appeared since Zguta's article. These have considerably modified the West European picture, which for Zguta was essentially that offered by the then recently published works of Trevor-Roper, Cohn and Thomas.⁵

Zguta has been partially challenged recently by another American scholar, Valerie Kivelson.⁶ Kivelson begins her article unpromisingly, with routine references to the *Malleus maleficarum*, and alleged 'Western

³ The subject is, however, touched on to some extent in Linda J. Ivanits, *Russian Folk Beliefs*, New York and London, 1989, *passim*. This treats the subject judiciously, but mainly from the folklorist's standpoint.

⁴ This phrase, literally 'word and deed of the sovereign', describes an investigative rather than a judicial procedure, which anyone could invoke if they wished to make an accusation of behaviour or speech inimical to the tsar, that is, treason. Both the accuser and accused were immediately arrested and interrogated under torture. The affair had to be referred to one of the *prikazy* (departments of state); in the eighteenth century, denunciations were normally dealt with locally and only the more serious passed on to the state departments which at various times dealt with state security (under Peter this was for a short time the Preobrazhenskii prikaz, then, from 1718, the Tainaia kantseliariia). The history of the procedure is obscure; there seems to be no documentary evidence of its establishment or of rules for its conduct, apart from the second chapter of the *Ulozhenie* of 1649. The third edition of the Soviet encyclopedia, *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, s.v., states that it probably began in the reign of Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich (1613–45). *Slovo i delo gosudarevo* was most widely invoked in the reign of Peter the Great (sometimes renamed as *gosudartsvennye prestupleniia*, 'state crimes'), when even a critical remark could be regarded as treason. It was abolished by Catherine the Great in 1762.

⁵ H. Trevor-Roper, 'The European Witch Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' (hereafter 'The European Witch Craze') in Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change, and Other Essays*, London, 1967, 2nd edn, 1972, pp. 90–192; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London, 1971; N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch Hunt*, New York, 1975.

⁶ Valerie A. Kivelson, 'Through the Prism of Witchcraft: Gender and Social Change in Seventeenth-Century Muscovy' in Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel and Christine D. Worobec (eds), *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, Berkeley, CA, 1991, pp. 74–94.

assumptions about witches', but goes on to present a valuable case-study of an outbreak of witch hysteria in the town of Lukh, to the north-east of Moscow, in 1656–60. This study is a useful corrective to Zguta in some respects, but has not yet had time to influence the wider literature on European witchcraft. The Lukh episode involved a considerable number of people of both sexes, mainly as a result of denunciations by accused persons under interrogation (in which torture was an obligatory part of the procedure). Many of the details of the accusations were typical of Russian popular magic and beliefs about witchcraft: the alleged witches were accused of crying out like wild animals, possessing herbs and roots, placing a cross under the heel (the usual Russian method of performing demonic magic, according to later accounts), performing magic at weddings (one of the main roles of the Russian *koldun* or magician), sending spells 'on the wind' (a particular type of exclusively malefic magic well-known in Russia), or scattering salt. Five men were eventually executed (the method is not stated in the documents). On the basis of this evidence, Kivelson challenges Zguta's statement that witchcraft trials were so much smaller in scale than in Western Europe and believes that greater archive research will produce more evidence than Novombergskii (who compiled the most comprehensive corpus of information on Russian witchcraft)⁷ and Zguta were able to assemble. (This is an optimistic thought — more evidence of legal and extra-legal punishment of witches will undoubtedly be found, but it is unlikely that any major witch panic in Russia has remained hidden from historians. Kivelson's own discovery, though valuable and certainly evidence of a witchcraft panic on a wider scale than has hitherto been noted in Russia, nevertheless is still a long way from the major witch persecutions which occurred in other parts of Europe.) Kivelson also casts doubt on Zguta's contention that demonic magic was unknown, but nevertheless claims that sabbaths and night-flying were not part of Russian witchcraft beliefs, that there was little emphasis on heresy, that *porcha* (\approx *maleficium*) had no demonic element, and that no distinction was made between white and black magic. She sees an increasingly intrusive state apparatus and the Old Believer schism which began in the 1640s as contributing to changed attitudes to witchcraft in Russia. Kivelson tries, at the end of her article (perhaps because it appears in a gender-studies volume on women in Russian society), to explain the male-to-female proportion of witchcraft accusations with some rather vague and unconvincing sociological observations about alleged differences in family structure in Russia and 'the

⁷ N. Ia. Novombergskii, *Koldovstvo v Moskovskoi Rusi XVII stoletii*, St Petersburg, 1906 (= *Materialy po istorii meditsiny v Rossii*, vol. 3, ch. 1), hereafter *Koldovstvo*.

West'. Part of her summary — 'Not gender alone, but social marginality, in conjunction with a compelling stereotype of witches as male, appears to have been the critical factor in Russian witchcraft allegations' — is, nevertheless, not inconsistent with part of what I argue in this paper; other arguments which I shall offer are relevant to Kivelson's conclusions as well as Zguta's.

In what follows I shall try to demonstrate that a historical consideration of the Russian terminology of magic and witchcraft, and an examination of the history of law relating to magic and witchcraft, in particular legal innovations in the early eighteenth century, enable us to see Russian witchcraft trials, and the evidence given in them, rather differently. This in turn may offer some useful pointers in the current debate about witchcraft trials and the nature of gender-specific magical activity in Europe as a whole.

II

Writing about magic and witchcraft in Russia is complicated by two factors. The first is the fact that the written sources are sparse and often difficult to interpret. The second is that terminological distinctions about 'magic', 'sorcery' or 'witchcraft' made confidently by anglophone scholars using the English words available to them, run into difficulties in Russian contexts.⁸ For example, Kivelson's remark quoted above, about the absence of a distinction between black and white magic in Russia, is strictly true but semantically naive: the terms did not exist in Old Russian and the underlying concepts had different resonances and were expressed differently. Kivelson nevertheless has some excuse: by the nineteenth century the Western distinction of 'black' and 'white' magic had influenced educated, and perhaps uneducated Russians — even the great Russian lexicographer and collector of folk wisdom, Vladimir Dal', stated in his dictionary, in the entry for *magiia* (a late and fairly learned lexical import into Russian), that magic is regarded as being either white or black. He went on to say that black magic includes *chernoknizhie*, *volkhovstvo*, *koldovstvo*, *vol'shebstvo* (that is, the usual words used in accusations of enchantment, witchcraft or sorcery) and involves the intervention of the spirit world, while *znakharstvo* may be either. In other words, Dal' knew exactly what words and concepts Russians actually had in earlier periods, but tried to force them into a taxonomy

⁸ The terminological difficulty also arises when one compares English, French, German and Latin: for some discussion see Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law*, Philadelphia, PA, 1978, pp. xvi–xvii.

which, though imported, was probably more familiar to the educated users of his late nineteenth-century dictionary.⁹

I am not here going to attempt yet another definition of magic, sorcery and witchcraft, or offer my views on the vexed topic of the relationship of magic, religion and proto-science, but some preliminary remarks on the historical terminology of the subject in Russian are necessary.

There was a rich vocabulary of words in Church Slavonic and Old Russian used to denote practices which can be loosely grouped under the headings of magic, *maleficium* and divination, and for those who practise magical arts either habitually or as a profession. A fair number of them survive in modern Russian, especially at dialect level, and although they are etymologically distinct, in practice they often function as synonyms, or near-synonyms, with semantic distinctions which may be very local (or even specific to an informant). With one or two individual exceptions, in medieval Russia there was little more than hearsay knowledge of astrology or alchemy, no 'learned' magic, no learned discussion of licit and illicit practices, and effectively no way of distinguishing terminologically between magic, sorcery and witchcraft as occasionally defined in modern literature, if indeed the concepts were separable at all. The first clue that we have to the importation into Russia of the distinction between 'natural' and 'demonic' magic is a mention of natural magic in the charter of the foundation of the Slavonic–Greek–Latin Academy in Moscow in 1682 under Tsar Fedor Alekseevich, which forbids them both, together with divination, under pain of death by burning.¹⁰

The nature of the practices designated by the several dozen native terms used at different times in the various parts of Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine, and the powers attributed to the practitioners of these arts, can vary considerably, and the sources from which the information about them is obtained also vary a great deal in reliability.¹¹ In fact, of course, it is usually impossible to know with any degree of clarity what lies behind the various terms used for magical practices and their devotees, especially when words surviving from a pre-Christian belief-system are used in a later Christian context, for example to translate

⁹ See V. Dal', *Tolkoviĭ slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka*, 2nd edn, Moscow and St Petersburg, 1880–82 (hereafter *Slovar'*).

¹⁰ Nikolai Novikov (ed.), *Drevniia russkaia viiiofika*, 2nd edn, 20 parts, Moscow, 1788–91, part 6, pp. 415–17.

¹¹ The Russian archaeologist Rybakov has discerned a whole hierarchy of magical specialists among the early East Slavs. This includes most of the words found in early Church Slavonic and Old Russian texts, including the less common *oblakoprogoniteli* ('cloud-dispersers'), *zhretsy* (usually this means 'pagan priest'), *khranil'niki* ('maker of talismans'), *potvorniki* ('maker of potions'), *koshchunniki* (? 'teller of fables' but later used in the sense of 'mockers of religion, blasphemers, sacrilegious persons'), and *baiany* ('bard; performer of incantations'): see B. A. Rybakov, *Iazychestvo drevnikh slavian*, Moscow, 1981, p. 298.

Greek words in patristic literature. Moreover, it is not always easy to tell which practices and beliefs have a long local history and which are imported from other areas. Indeed, in written sources the multiple terms for magician which can occasionally be found may well be no more than reduplication for rhetorical effect — for example, in the *vita* of St Stefan of Perm' by Epifanii Premudryi (fourteenth–fifteenth centuries), the chief of the Permian shamans Pam is described in a single phrase as a *'volkhv* (wizard, shaman), *charodeevyi starets* (spell-making elder), *kudesnik* (one of a group of words deriving from the same root, with meanings which may include [depending on date and locality] 'magician, demon, curse, evil trick, midwinter mask ritual'; it is used in one sixteenth-century document to describe a Karelian shaman), *obavnik* (magician, caster of spells)' and poisoner.¹² It is unlikely that the author, the best-known exponent of the elaborate style of that period known as 'word-weaving', was actually making distinctions here: the idea that there was an organized hierarchy of priest-magicians among the early Slavs, with clearly labelled specialist subgroups, must be treated with great scepticism. The inclusion of the word 'poisoner' in the description of Pam is part of an association of ideas in literature and law, common to all Europe but particularly marked in Russia, stretching from Roman law, through patristic theology and penitentials, up to the eighteenth century (in Russia at least). The Russian word *zelie*, related to the word for 'green', has from early times had the meanings: '[green] plant; [magical/medicinal] herb; magic potion (often love potion); poison'; and more recently 'gunpowder'.

When discussing the terminology and semantics of magic and witchcraft it has also to be borne in mind that there was in Russia no equivalent of the scholastic theological and legal discussion of demonology, or of types of magic and divination and their relationship to heresy, such as was found in the West, in particular in manuals for inquisitors. At the same time, however, I should add that my own research leads me to believe that, regardless of terminology, from a purely descriptive point of view, there are relatively few magical beliefs, practices or artefacts in Russia, or more generally among the East Slavs (that is, including the Belarusians and Ukrainians) which cannot be shown to have Western analogues, either Germanic or drawn from the same melting pot of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East which Europe shares. The other less common analogues are mostly Finnic.

¹² I am quoting from the sixteenth-century copy published as *Povest' o Stefane, episkope permskom* in *Pamiatniki starinnoi russkoi literatury, izdannye G. Kushelev-Bezborodko*, ed. N. Kostomarov, 4 vols, St Petersburg, 1860–62, iv, p. 138.

III

Let us now turn to the contention that demonic magic was not known in Russia, or at least not known until the eighteenth century. One can find in recent literature in English written by specialists in early modern history the assertion that demonic magic and the demonic pact even in the West were a relatively late (fifteenth-century) concept, defined by theologians who were concerned to equate witchcraft with heresy, or by late medieval and humanist scholar-occultists who may have been concerned to protect themselves by distinguishing licit from illicit activities. One can also find assertions that these distinctions are linked with those convenient but very suspect binary models, high and low, or learned and popular culture.

Although the Renaissance, the Roman and Spanish Inquisitions and the Reformation undoubtedly played their part in the development of these concepts, in particular as far as the written and legal record of witchcraft is concerned and in the development of legal doctrine and practice relating to witchcraft and magic, the concept of demonic magic certainly did not originate there.

In fact, both Russia and the Latin West inherited from the early Christian world a number of texts, both literary and theological, and a variety of enactments of church councils and synods, which made it clear that the early Church, like the civil authorities of Imperial Rome which in some respects it was to replace, was strongly opposed to magic and divination. In Christian religious literature from the earliest times, the association of the Devil, or demons however defined, with magic is often stated explicitly, and there was a general attempt in the early Church, after it became official within the Roman Empire, to lump together magic (often with poisoning), divination, paganism and heresy, and to portray them not simply as contrary to good religion but also as an anti-social, even treasonable activity.¹³

A Russian historian of witchcraft, Antonovich, stated confidently in 1877 that the connection between the Devil and witchcraft was made

¹³ See A. Barb, 'The Survival of Magic Arts' in Arnaldo Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 100–25; R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, Cambridge, MA, 1966, chapters 3 and 4; and a flurry of more recent pieces including: Carlo Castello, 'Cenni sulla repressione del reato di magia dagli inizi del principato fino a Costanzo II' in *Atti dell'Accademia romanistica Costantiniana: VIII Convegno internazionale*, Naples, 1990, pp. 665–93; F. R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization c. 370–529*, Leiden, 1993, chapter 1, part iv: 'The Legislation against Sorcery'; Franziska E. Schlosser, 'Pagans into Magicians', *Byzantinoslavica*, 52, 1991, pp. 49–53; Santiago Montero, *Política y adivinación en el Bajo Imperio Romano: Emeradores y haruspices (193 DC–408 DC)*, Collection Latomus 211, Brussels, 1991. See also David E. Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 23, Berlin and New York, 1980, pp. 1507–57, and, on the area of magic and miracles, Rowan A. Greer, *The Fear of Freedom: A Study of Miracles in the Roman Imperial Church*, University Park, PA and London, 1989, esp. pp. 119–24.

in Russia only in the eighteenth century, and then only by the literate classes influenced by Western books.¹⁴ This view has been frequently repeated, crucially by Zguta (although he does not actually cite Antonovich), and following Zguta by Levack and Larner, to mention only two of the more influential English-language scholars of the subject who refer to Russia. Zguta, while mentioning in passing the abundant evidence of a connection between magic and the Devil in Old Russian texts, also states that there is only one instance of satanism in seventeenth-century Russian witchcraft trials.¹⁵ Larner states that in Russia the notion of the 'demonic pact' did not exist, and that there was little reference to conspiracy in witch trials.¹⁶ Levack claims, on the basis of Zguta's article, that in Russia there was no notion of the demonic pact and that witches were not thought to fly, to hold sabbaths or to kill children.¹⁷

Zguta's 'one instance of satanism' is misleading; and none of the other statements is true. In fact Antonovich, the probable ultimate source of these opinions, was culpably ignoring much of his own literary and cultural history. Bearing in mind the improbability of any substantial influence from Western Europe before the sixteenth century, and the strong influence of Byzantium, one may point to several examples of Slavonic and Russian familiarity with the demonic connection with magic. For example, the story in the Greek second-century apocryphal *Acta Petri* (and elsewhere, elaborated from Acts 8: 9–24) of how Simon Magus, the magician antagonist of the apostle Peter, practised magic with the aid of evil spirits, was certainly known to the Slavs; the *volkhvy*, the pagan wizards with whom the priests and princes of early Russia had to contend, were undoubtedly thought of as practising demonic magic — one regularly finds in the Russian Chronicles expressions such as 'devilish magic-making',¹⁸ and the twelfth-century *Russian Primary Chronicle*, in the entry for 1071, is unequivocal in its definition of magic as having an infernal origin and mentions two magicians who declared that the name of their God was

¹⁴ V. B. Antonovich, *Koldovstvo: Dokumenty — protsessy — issledovanie*, St Petersburg, 1877 (hereafter *Koldovstvo*).

¹⁵ Zguta, 'Witchcraft Trials' (see note 2 above), p. 1204.

¹⁶ Christina Larner, *Enemies of God*, London, 1981, pp. 11, 197; see also Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*, Oxford, 1985 (hereafter *Witchcraft and Religion*), p. 88.

¹⁷ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, London, 1987, pp. 200–01.

¹⁸ The linking of *volkhv* 'magician, shaman' and its derivatives with the word *bes* 'Devil' or its derivatives can be seen in many of the examples quoted in the most modern dictionary of Old Russian, *Slovar' russkogo iazyka XI–XVII vv.* (Moscow, 1975–), s.vv.

Antichrist.¹⁹ The *Novgorod Kormchaia* (book of canon law) of c. 1280 excommunicates anyone engaging in 'witchcraft and the conjuring of demons'.

At the level more likely to have been known to ordinary Russians, lay or clerical, for whom the lives of the saints were the main literary entertainment, we have the *vita* of St Cyprian of Antioch (c. 300), a magician who was converted while attempting to seduce a Christian virgin called Justina by magic with the help of the Devil;²⁰ or the young man in the very popular pseudo-Amphilochian *vita* of St Basil who followed the advice of a magician and made a pact with the Devil so that he could by magic entice into marriage a young woman intended for the cloister. Eventually he was taken to a church by St Basil and the prayers of the congregation defeated the wiles and torments of the Devil; the written pact came floating through the air into the saint's hands. The last part of the story is represented pictorially in a sixteenth-century fresco in the Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Moscow Kremlin. Both stories were included in the miscellanies of saints' lives which were read in churches, monasteries and in the home. The second of these two texts was known from at least the twelfth century and was the main source of several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Russian literary tales.²¹ It should be noted that these examples are of early Byzantine Greek origin.

A Russian penitential of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, after condemning those who consult wizards and buy amulets, remarks that

¹⁹ In Russia, as elsewhere, the notions of the Beast of the Apocalypse, the Antichrist and the Devil are often conflated: see the first three pages of W. F. Ryan, 'The Great Beast in Russia: Aleister Crowley's Theatrical Tour to Moscow in 1913 and his Beastly Writings on Russia' in Arnold McMillin (ed.), *Symbolism and After: Essays on Russian Poetry in Honour of Georgette Donchin*, Bristol, 1992, pp. 137–61. For recent discussion of these passages of the Chronicle and its significance in early Russian religious history, see Simon Franklin, 'The Reception of Byzantine Culture by the Slavs' in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers*, New Rochelle, NY, 1996, pp. 383–97 (pp. 386–88, 391) and Remo Faccani, 'Jan' Vysatič e l'«anno dei maghi». (Episodi del conflitto tra la «nuova» e la «vecchia fede» nella Rus' del XI secolo)' in Sante Graciotti (ed.), *Il battesimo delle Terre Russe: Bilancio di un millennio*, Florence, 1991, pp. 25–43. For further discussions of the pagan magicians referred to in the Chronicles, see Irène Sorlin, 'Femmes et sorciers: Note sur la permanence des rituels païens en Russie, XIe–XIXe siècle', *Travaux et mémoires: Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance*, 8, 1981, pp. 459–75. Despite its title, this is concerned primarily with the accounts of *volkhvy* in the earliest period of Russian Christianity, on which see also Simon Franklin, 'The Empire of the *Rhomaioi* as Viewed from Kievan Russia: Aspects of Byzantino-Russian Cultural Relations', *Byzantion*, 53, 1983, 2, pp. 508–37 (on *volkhvy*, p. 523); → Russell Zguta, 'The Pagan Priests of Early Russia: Some New Insights', *Slavic Review*, 33, 1974, pp. 259–66.

²⁰ See *Velikie chet'i minei* for 2 October. This story is one of the main early sources for the demonic pact.

²¹ See R. Cleminson, 'The Miracle *De juvene qui Christum negaverat* in the Pseudo-Amphilochian *Vita Basilii* and its Slavonic Adaptations', *Parergon*, new series, 8, 1992, pp. 1–15.

anyone believing in charms is serving the Devil.²² Magical practices and popular amusements were regularly described in sixteenth-century Russia as 'devilish' (*besovskii*) and 'Hellenic' (*ellinskii*) in texts of moral and social guidance such as the *Domostroi* and *Stoglav* (the record of the church council summoned by Ivan the Terrible in Moscow in 1551 — this is discussed in greater detail below), thus there seems to have been a strong presumption that anything not specifically Christian (that is, in most cases Orthodox) was the province of the Devil.²³

The sixteenth-century rebel Prince Andrei Kurbskii, in one of his diatribes against Ivan the Terrible, the *History of the Grand Prince of Muscovy*, accuses Ivan of having been conceived by the magic of Karelian witches summoned by his father, and of himself employing these witches, and various types of *charovnik* and *sheptun* (lit. 'user of spells' and 'whisperer', the latter indicating a common method of uttering spells right up to the modern period) who commune with the Devil (the summoning of these magicians is a well-attested historical fact, and Finnish magicians had a wide European reputation). Kurbskii also claimed that the Devil had corrupted the rulers of Russia through their sorcerous wives (that is, Sofia Palaeologa and Elena Glinskaia, respectively the wives of Ivan II and Vasili III, the grandfather and father of Ivan IV), that Ivan drank toasts to the Devil and danced in masks. He states specifically: 'Magic, as everyone knows, cannot be performed without renouncing God and making a pact with the Devil.'²⁴ As evidence of knowledge of the demonic pact in sixteenth-century Russia this would seem to be compelling. And if statements at this level of society are thought to be too sophisticated to be used as an indication of beliefs and practices at a more popular level, we may consider the evidence of the first major foreign travel writer on Muscovy, Herberstein, who noted in 1557 that Muscovite bishops had to deal with many cases of witchcraft, poisoning and heresy, and the spoliation of tombs or removal of portions of images or crucifixes for purposes of magic.²⁵

The early seventeenth century offers a contemporary Russian chronicle which accuses the Polish-supported usurper of the Tsar's throne, the so-called False Dmitrii, of practising 'gypsy sorcery and every kind of devilish magic [...] like Julian the Apostate who did

²² S. I. Smirnov, 'Materialy dlia istorii drevne-russkoi pokaiannoi distsipliny' (hereafter 'Materialy'), *Chteniia v Obshchestve istorii i drevnostei Rossiiskikh*, 242, book 3, 1912, p. 65.

²³ See O. A. Cherepanova, 'Nabliudeniia nad leksikoi Stoglava (Leksika, sviazannaia s poniatiiami dukhovnoi i kul'turnoi zhizni)' in *Russkaia istoricheskaia leksikologiia i leksikografiia*, vyp. 3, Leningrad, 1983, pp. 17–25.

²⁴ J. L. I. Fennell, *Kurbsky's History of Ivan IV*, Cambridge, 1965, pp. 2–3, 180–81, 202–03.

²⁵ Sigmund von Herberstein, *Rerum Moscovitarum commentarii* — see the English translation in *Description of Moscow and Muscovy 1557*, ed. B. Picard, trans. J. B. C. Grundy, London, 1969, p. 52.

sorcery with devils' and later that he 'cast spells with devils'.²⁶ A contemporary account of the death of Dmitrii makes it clear that he was buried ritually as if he had been a *koldun*, a Russian magician,²⁷ and his Polish wife was described as an 'evil heretic witch' who turned herself into a magpie to escape from the Kremlin.²⁸ Here the assimilation of heresy and witchcraft in a non-Latin context is particularly to be noted — it is often described as an invention of the Inquisition, which did indeed normally try cases of witchcraft as heresy.

Another more or less contemporary history declares that the Muscovites regarded Dmitrii as a sorcerer who kept a devil in a fearful war machine, which was eventually burned with his corpse; also that the Muscovites thought that Dmitrii adored as gods the masks which he had prepared for a court entertainment.²⁹ To Russians, masks were associated primarily with pagan, usually midwinter, rituals which were regularly condemned by the Russian Church as satanic. This was reinforced by the most frequently quoted theological authority, the acts of the Trullan Synod of 692. Among other things, this regulates marriage and sexual behaviour; forbids association with Jews; forbids mixed bathing, going to horse-races, mimes, animal shows, theatrical dancing, consulting diviners, sorcerers, cloud-chasers, purveyors of amulets; forbids celebrating the Calends, Vota and Brumalia; and forbids wearing comic, satyric or tragic masks and jumping over fires at the beginning of the month.

At a more popular level, and without such satisfying and datable textual precision, the extensive Russian folklore and ethnographic literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth century certainly recorded belief in the demonic associations of witches in Russia and Russian Siberia, and perhaps even more so in the Ukraine and Belarus, to the south and west of Muscovy, which had been under Polish rule, and subject to Polish law, and where more Western influence can be detected.

But when we speak of the Devil in this context what kind or kinds of devil or demons are involved? The Russian Church was no different from the Western Church in the imprecise nature and history of its

²⁶ Chronograph of 1617, in L. A. Dmitriev and D. S. Likhachev (eds), *Pamiatniki literatury Drevnei Rusi. Konets XVI–nachalo XVII vekov*, Moscow, 1987, pp. 328, 332.

²⁷ B. A. Uspenskii, 'Tsar and Pretender: *Samozvanchestvo* or Royal Imposture in Russia as a Cultural-Historical Phenomenon' (hereafter 'Tsar and Pretender') in Ju. M. Lotman, B. A. Uspenskij, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1984, pp. 259–92, esp. 273–76.

²⁸ K. Danilov, *Drevnie rossiiskie stikhotvoreniia, sobrannye Kirseiui Danilovym*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1958, pp. 79, 81.

²⁹ Isaac Massa, *A Short History of the Beginnings and Origins of These Present Wars in Moscow under the Reign of Various Sovereigns down to the Year 1610*, trans. G. Edward Orchard, Toronto, 1982, pp. 118, 138, 147.

demonology and its ambivalence about personifications of evil. There is no definite or indefinite article in Russian so that one cannot always know whether a text is speaking of *a* devil, or *the* Devil, and just as often there will be references to evil forces under a variety of names, often euphemisms. Some are a little unexpected: 'the Hagarene' (this usually means a Muslim), 'not-one-of-us', 'the joker', 'the unwashed one', Herod, and Galilei.³⁰ Church Slavonic and Russian *bēs* regularly translates Greek *daimōn*, the term used in patristic texts for all pagan gods and supernatural beings; *diavol* is found for Greek *diabolos* from the earliest translations of the Gospels onwards; *sotona* (Russian *satana*) is found for both *satanas* and *diabolos*; and *chert*, *chort* is probably the commonest name in colloquial Russian, and in popular belief the Devil's own favourite name for himself.³¹

Moreover, the Devil, or devils, of the Bible and Christian literature, and as visualized by medieval Christian writers and artists, were often identified with the goblins of Slavonic folklore. Indeed, as has been shown in a recent Russian study of the beliefs and terminology of the supernatural in North Russia, there can be an almost complete coalescence of the Christian and pagan traditions, to the extent of inventing names for the various goblins of Russian popular belief which are compounds of names drawn from what were originally separate belief systems. A whole series of ambivalent creatures is thus created: *lesnoi bes* 'forest devil', *vodianoi chert* 'water devil', *chert podpol'nyi* 'the devil under the floor' and so on.³² The ambivalence is further complicated by the fact that not all the goblins of folk belief are necessarily, or always, perceived to be hostile or demonic in a Christian sense. This may be evidence of *dvoeverie* ('double faith'), an imprecise concept often quoted by historians as a distinguishing feature of Russia's religious and cultural development, but is perhaps best seen as plain syncretism.³³

As further evidence for a close association in Russian folklore and popular belief between Christian and non-Christian notions of the demonic, I would quote use of the word *eretik* 'heretic' to mean also

³⁰ Dal', *Slovar'* (see note 9 above), s.v. *bēs*, gives an extensive list of names and euphemisms. S. V. Maksimov, *Nechistaia, nevedomaia i krestnaia sila*, St Petersburg, 1903, p. 4, repeats this list and gives a few more, to a total of over forty.

³¹ B. A. Uspenskii, 'The Language Situation and Linguistic Consciousness in Muscovite Rus': The Perception of Church Slavic and Russian' in H. Birnbaum and M. S. Flier (eds.), *Medieval Russian Culture*, California Slavic Studies, 12, Berkeley, CA, 1984, pp. 364–85 (p. 384).

³² O. A. Cherepanova, *Mifologicheskaia leksika russkogo severa*, Leningrad, 1983, esp. pp. 41–44.

³³ For a welcome plea to redefine this concept of *dvoeverie*, see Eve Levin, 'Dvoeverie and Popular Religion' in S. Batalden (ed.), *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*, DeKalb, IL, 1993, pp. 31–52.

'wizard', 'demon' and 'vampire'.³⁴ To this we can add the meaning 'revenant spirit of a dead atheist' in northern Siberia, which makes sense of what otherwise would be a puzzling local expression: 'Why are you wandering round at night like a heretic?'³⁵ Although I cannot be sure of the earliest use of the term 'heretic' for magician, it may have been in use in the sixteenth century,³⁶ it was certainly in use in the seventeenth century (as we have seen in the case of the wife of the False Dmitrii), and would seem to contradict the claim that witchcraft and heresy were not linked in Russia.³⁷ In guides for confessors, at least from the seventeenth century, priests were told to ask penitents if they have practised magic, prayed to the Devil, or trampled on icons or crosses.³⁸ The last-mentioned practices are, of course, the standard method of invoking the Devil to help in a piece of magic. A mid-fifteenth-century penitential, *The Rules of the Holy Apostles*, condemns bestiality, unapproved coital positions, seeking the help of devils and going to wizards for fortune-telling or amulets.³⁹ Another sixteenth-century list of sins condemns the use of magic potions (*zelie*) for murder, procuring abortions or conceiving a child, as well as believing in dreams, fortune-telling and praying to Satan.⁴⁰ (One has to wonder how often confessors, East or West, actually asked their parishioners the recommended questions during confession, and how often people actually went to confess that they had been praying to the Devil!)

One of the problems of interpreting this kind of information about popular belief and terminology is that most of it was recorded by lexicographers, folklorists or ethnographers not before the eighteenth and usually in the later nineteenth century. But there is sufficient evidence from the fifteenth century onwards to suggest that much of it was true in one form or another in earlier periods. Magic spells, for example, many of which are recorded from Russia and the Balkans, mostly from the seventeenth century onwards but often quite clearly derived from Byzantine models, or with West European cognates, may be divided into two categories, according to whether they invoke Christ, the Virgin and the Saints, or the Devil and assorted demons. In the latter case, as with many kinds of popular divination, the caster of the spell, usually a nasty malefic spell, may well begin by saying, in

³⁴ See Feliks J. Oinas, 'Heretics as Vampires and Demons in Russia' in Oinas, *Essays on Russian Folklore and Mythology*, Columbus, OH, 1985, pp. 121–30.

³⁵ A. G. Chikachev, *Russkie na Indigirke*, Novosibirsk, 1990, p. 130.

³⁶ Mark Ridley, in his manuscript dictionary of Russian, though he translates *eretik* as 'heretic', gives 'superstition' for *eretichestva*: see Gerald Stone (ed.), *A Dictionarie of the Vulgar Russe Tongue, Attributed to Mark Ridley*, Cologne, 1996.

³⁷ Zguta, 'Witchcraft Trials' (see note 2 above), p. 1206.

³⁸ For some examples, see A. I. Almazov, 'Tainaia ispoved' v pravoslavnoi vostochnoi tserkvi', *Žapiski Imperatorskogo Novorossiiskogo Universiteta*, 63, 1894, pp. 405, 408.

³⁹ Smirnov, 'Materialy' (see note 22 above), p. 65.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–47.

parodic inversion of the more prayer-like spell formula, that he or she will *not* rise and pray, will *not* face east, will remove his or her girdle and cross and trample them under foot, and will call on demons, who are sometimes named, to carry out whatever the spell-caster wishes.⁴¹

When we turn from the literary and anthropological evidence to the evidence of trials in which magic and witchcraft was an element, then it certainly is true that, despite the very evident fear of magic in the seventeenth century and a parallel preoccupation with the Devil, especially in Old Believer communities who thought themselves to be living in the reign of the Antichrist and were expecting the end of the world, there would not appear at first sight to be substantial evidence of a precise concept of demonic magic, or accusations in which there is specific mention of demonic elements, until the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The reason for this apparent contradiction between the literary, anthropological and folkloric evidence and the evidence of witchcraft trial records is, I believe, fairly simple, but requires a brief survey of the legal history of magic and witchcraft in Russia.

IV

The early eleventh-century *Ustav* of Prince Vladimir Sviatoslavich is an edict establishing the boundaries of jurisdiction of princely and church law. The latter was to include all areas of family law, sexual misdemeanours, and magical practices. The magical practices are listed in the earliest version of the *Ustav* as *vedstvo* (magic, probably malefic), *urekanie* (probably, in this context, cursing), *uzly* (knots, and probably talismans in general), *zel'e* (in this context either magic potions or poison, or both), and *zuboïadenie* (lit. 'tooth-biting' — this is an obscure term and has been variously interpreted as simply biting during a fight, eating meat in biblically proscribed categories, magical cannibalism, and vampirism).⁴² This *Ustav* is known in a large number of versions and in many copies up to the eighteenth century. The Synodal version, a fourteenth-century annex to the *Novgorod Kormchaia* of c. 1280 mentioned above, expands the list of magical practices to include *potvory* (magic; poison), *charodeianiia* (lit. 'charm-making'), *volkhvovaniia* (lit. the acts of a *volkhv* or shaman). It also lists various kinds

⁴¹ One such is no. 48 in L. N. Maikov, 'Velikoruskie zaklinaniia', *Žapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva po otdeleniiu etnografii*, 2, 1869, pp. 419–580, a spell from the Novgorod region. Maikov also quotes other love spells addressed to the Devil, for example, nos. 16 and 24.

⁴² See *Rossiiskoe zakonodatel'stvo X–XX vekov. I: Zakonodatel'stvo Drevnei Rusi*, Moscow, 1984 (hereafter *Zakonodatel'stvo Drevnei Rusi*), pp. 140, 145, 158–59.

of pagan religious practice, infanticide, theft from churches, theft of corpses, damaging crosses or carving on walls and bringing animals into the church.⁴³ Essentially the same list is to be found in a later Novgorod law code, the *Ustav* of Prince Vsevolod, variously ascribed to the twelfth or fourteenth century.⁴⁴ The *Ustav* of Prince Vladimir Sviatoslavich does not specify punishment, but evidence from other sources indicates that trial by water was practised to discover witches (and perpetrators of other crimes)⁴⁵ and that four magicians (*volkhvy*) were executed by burning in Novgorod in 1227, and twelve female witches in Pskov in 1411.⁴⁶

A later elaboration of the *Ustav* of Prince Vladimir Sviatoslavich is the *Ustav* of Prince Iaroslav (?eleventh-twelfth centuries). This essentially outlines the areas of church jurisdiction and lists offences which can be punished under church law. Unlike the earlier *Ustav*, it lists the punishments appropriate to each offence, and unlike Byzantine law in this area, which often specifies severe corporal punishment, these punishments are usually penances or fines or both. Article thirty-eight of this *Ustav* states that if a woman is a *charodeinitsa*, *nauznitsa*, *ili zeleinitsa*, *ili volkhva* ('caster of spells, maker of amulets, or maker of magic potions, or female shaman'), she is to be punished by her husband, and her behaviour will not be considered grounds for divorce.⁴⁷ This article is in fact not dealing primarily with magic (there is no mention of male magicians or heresy) but with marital law.

When, in 1551, Ivan IV (the Terrible) summoned a council of the Church to debate a list of moral and ecclesiastical questions presented by the Tsar, magical practices, and texts, are listed for the first time in detail. Chapter forty-one, Question seventeen, mentions the diabolical practices of magicians, astrology and several divinatory texts. The response of the council is that these things are heresy which the Tsar should uproot from his realm, and that these diabolical practices of Greek origin should be punished with political disgrace (*opala*) and

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 149, 157–60.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 251.

⁴⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 93, also Zguta, 'Witchcraft Trials', p. 1190. Zguta states, probably correctly, that the water ordeal to discover witches appears to have died out quite early in Muscovite Russia, but survived in the Ukraine. He does not point out that this was because the Ukraine was administered under the law of the Lithuanian Statute, which derived not from Byzantine law or Russian customary law, but from West European, mostly Catholic models.

⁴⁶ *Zakonodatel'stvo Drevnei Rusi*, p. 158. Zguta mentions these cases, which he describes inaccurately as *auto-da-fé*, and states, probably correctly, that these were popular, extra-legal responses to supposed cases of witchcraft at times of natural disaster: see Zguta, 'Witchcraft Trials', pp. 1189–90.

⁴⁷ *Zakonodatel'stvo Drevnei Rusi*, pp. 191, 202–03.

excommunication from the Church.⁴⁸ This appeal to the Tsar to deal with the matter under both princely and canon law perhaps indicates a recognition by the Russian bishops that they could not control the situation, rather than a surrender of jurisdiction — the full text of the *Ustav* of Vladimir is quoted later in the *Stoglav* (Chapter sixty-three), together with other texts on church courts. Question twenty-two of the same chapter returns to the subject of diabolical and heretical texts, which include the *Six Wings*, *Secretum secretorum*, geomancy and almanachs. The fathers of the council reply again that the Tsar should issue a strict *ukaz* enjoining all the bishops and priests of his realm to ban these heretical books under pain of severe disgrace and excommunication and anathema (this too is a rather interesting recommendation, advocating as it does the enforcement of canon law by secular authorities).⁴⁹

Chapter ninety-three of the *Stoglav* outlines the canon law precedents for dealing with sorcery and magic. It quotes articles sixty-one and sixty-two of the acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III, 680–81), which deal with the consultation of magicians, pagan customs of the Greeks, games, bear-leading, various kinds of divination, celebrating pagan festivals, dancing and transvestism, with further brief reference to the acts of other councils and synods. It concludes by saying that ‘every kind of magic is forbidden by God, for it means serving the devil’.

This essentially patristic and canon law view of magic as *demonic by its very nature* seems to have become the legal norm in Russia for the next century and a half. The condemnations of magic, together with other devilish and pagan customs, are repeated in much the same terms, and amplified in the seventeenth century in various *ukazy* of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich.

The break in this legal tradition comes in 1716, when Peter the Great introduced a code of military law, the *Voinskii artikul*. In article one of its first chapter, ‘On the fear of God’, this states:

If any soldier is found to be an idol-worshipper, black magician, gun-charmer, or superstitious and blasphemous enchanter, depending on the nature of the offence he shall be placed under close arrest, put in irons, made to run the gauntlet, or be burned to death. *Interpretation*: Death by

⁴⁸ Zguta, ‘Witchcraft Trials’, p. 1191. Zguta’s statement that the death penalty was specified is incorrect. The original Russian text has *opala i nakazanie* ‘political disfavour and punishment’. For a French translation of the text, see E. Duchesne, *Le Stoglav, ou Les Cent Chapitres*, Paris, 1920, p. 122.

⁴⁹ Some Russian churchmen were aware as early as 1490 of the activities of the Spanish Inquisition and approved of the involvement of the state in dealing with dissident elements: for a brief English summary of the evidence, with bibliography, see James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*, London, 1966, p. 70. Billington states that the execution of heretics by burning starts at this time in Russia.

burning is to be the normal punishment for black magicians if they have harmed anyone by magic, or had dealings with the Devil. If he has not harmed anyone or had dealings with the Devil then he should be punished by one of the other punishments listed above, and made to do public church penance.

It is perhaps worth noting that one of the 'lesser punishments' mentioned, running the gauntlet, was itself an innovation in the same law. It involved being driven at bayonet-point through a battalion (500 men) or a regiment (1000 men) arranged in two lines and armed with rods. Soldiers failing to strike hard enough were themselves punished. Sentences could specify running through the lines up to twelve times. The victims often died on the spot.⁵⁰

Article two of Peter's military law states that anyone who hires a magician or encourages anyone else to do this, so that he harms someone, shall be punished in the same way as the magician. Article three lays down that any soldier guilty of blasphemy shall have his tongue burned through with a hot iron and then be beheaded. Most cases were in fact punished with lesser penalties and public penance; had they not been, the Russian army — surely no less licentious than other soldiery — would have been decimated.⁵¹

The severe treatment prescribed for those suspected of magic, even if borrowed from foreign models, continued after Peter; a decree of the Empress Anna of 25 May 1731 specifies death or the knout as the punishment for practising magic. To a large extent, the instructions for dealing with magic and witchcraft in Peter's military code contradict Peter's later legislation reforming the Church, the *Ecclesiastical Regulation* of 1721 in which magic and witchcraft were condemned not as blasphemous crimes against religion but as fraudulent impositions on the gullible. This, the typical Enlightenment approach to the problem, continued to be a guiding principle in Russian legislation on the subject right up to the 1917 Revolution.

In fact, Peter's military code, far from being a barbarous Russian invention, was based on a report written by one of Peter's senior

⁵⁰ See A. G. Timofeev, *Istoriia telesnykh nakazanii v russkom prave*, St Petersburg, 1904, pp. 280–87. Timofeev also states that the knout was used in the eighteenth century for those found guilty of witchcraft (*vol'shebstvo*), as well as of crimes against the state, heresy, schism and proselytizing: see *ibid.*, p. 225. In other words, whatever the ostensible boundaries of canon and civil law, in Russia, as in most countries at one time or another, religious heterodoxy was regarded as politically dangerous and was dealt with accordingly.

⁵¹ A. Popov, *Sud i nakazaniia za prestupleniia protiv very i nraustvennosti po russkomu pravu*, Kazan', 1904, p. 370.

advisers, General Adam Weyde,⁵² outlining the best current European practice, now that Russia was actively seeking the status of a civilized European nation.⁵³ But ironically, by spelling out the law in Western terminology and using Western legal concepts, the provisions of Peter's law meant that those accused of witchcraft were treated perhaps worse in the eighteenth than they had been in the seventeenth century and earlier. (This is partly because the infliction of corporal and capital punishment was in general much more widely and arbitrarily employed in the reign of Peter, and his immediate successors up to the reign of Catherine II, in support of his unpopular Westernizing reforms.)⁵⁴

The provisions against witchcraft in Peter's military law were borrowed primarily from the 1683 edition of the Swedish military code, introduced by the Protestant King of Sweden Gustavus Adolphus in 1621–32, which was itself derived from earlier models, including the *Constitutio criminalis Carolina* of the Catholic Emperor Charles V from the sixteenth century,⁵⁵ and Danish and French ordinances. The Swedish law of Gustavus Adolphus, like the Russian, devotes its first article to the 'fear of God' and forbids magic and gun-spells with similar savage penalties. This instructive legal pedigree demonstrates the difficulty of trying to identify distinct Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic attitudes to magic and witchcraft!

Although Peter's military law was not the first non-canon law in Russia to make witchcraft and the practice of magic an offence (there were edicts banning magic in one form or another under all the tsars from Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century to Aleksei Mikhailovich, Peter the Great's father), it was the first which was not in fact a civil

⁵² General Adam Weyde was one of Peter's inner circle. He had been an officer of the Preobrazhenskii regiment and had been one of those who were sent abroad by Peter to study foreign military methods. He was much involved in the administrative reforms of Peter's reign, in particular the introduction of the collegial system based on the Swedish model (he had been a prisoner-of-war in Sweden) and the recruitment of foreign specialists, including experienced lawyers. In 1717, he was appointed Vice-President of the College of War under Prince Alexander Menshikov.

⁵³ N. A. Voskresenskii, *Zakonodatel'nye akty Petra I*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1945, p. 29.

⁵⁴ See Timofeev, *Istoriia telesnykh nakazanii v russkom prave*, pp. 88–89.

⁵⁵ See P. O. Bobrovskii, *Voennoe pravo v Rossii pri Petre Velikom*, vyp. 1, St Petersburg, 1882; vyp. 2, 1886, pp. 134–35, 144–45, 158–60. Bobrovskii concludes that the relevant articles of Peter's code are in fact derived from Swedish and German codes. As far as I can discover, subsequent Russian and Soviet legal historians have ignored Bobrovskii's findings on this point, although he is quoted extensively by Epifanov on other aspects of Peter's military law: see P. P. Epifanov, 'Voinskii Ustav Petra Velikogo' in A. I. Andreev (ed.), *Petr Velikii. Sbornik statei*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1947, pp. 167–213. This was the main Soviet study of Peter's military law, and appearing, as it did, just after World War II and in the middle of the Stalin cult of personality, was mainly concerned to rebut bourgeois falsifications about foreign influences and credit Peter personally with creating a military code and practice which culminated in the victories of the Red Army under the *velikii polkovodets* Stalin. He does not discuss articles one and two. The several non-Russian historians who have discussed Peter's military law have been interested primarily in comparative law or administrative reform, and as far as I can discover have not dealt with this issue either.

implementation of canon law as understood in Russia, and the first to make a specific and literal legal distinction between demonic and non-demonic practice. Not surprisingly, appropriately worded evidence of demonic practice immediately began to appear in accusations, denunciations and confessions. Before Peter's law, the Russians did not make the distinction between demonic and non-demonic magic — as we have seen in the *Stoglav* above, *all* magic was considered to be demonic by definition. The relatively few records of court cases in the seventeenth century in which magic was involved, often cases based on denunciation for treason, are usually concerned with whether or not the accused had learned his magic from someone else, divulged it to someone else or written it down, and whether or not the magical substances found on the accused were used without or with magic spells. The latter point usually appears indirectly — if the list of objects found on the accused or after search of his dwelling included a *tetradka* (= roughly 'manuscript pamphlet'), this meant that the accused had a stock of written spells.

There are two important points here. The first is the general point that there are not many cases where persons were simply accused of being a witch or magician; more commonly the magical practices are cited as part of wider evidence of wrongdoing or public disorder — indeed many of the cases can hardly be called witchcraft trials at all. The second point is that where the evidence is of possession of herbs or roots, or other substances used together with magical spells, or where the accusation is of 'whispering' or 'sending on the wind', or involves footprints, it was assumed automatically, and sometimes stated explicitly, that the intention of the accused was *porcha* (which originally had the meaning of 'harm', 'damage' or 'illness'), which in fact, as Zguta rightly pointed out, is the direct equivalent of the Latin *maleficium* (though not attested before the seventeenth century in this sense). The evidence both from the seventeenth century and even more from later folkloric and ethnographic sources suggests that everyone accepted that *porcha* involved the *nechistaia sila*, the 'unclean spirit', a term used in Russian to mean anything from the Devil to a demon from popular mythology.⁵⁶ Moreover, *porcha* was thought of as being largely in the domain of the *koldun*, the wizard who belonged in the un-Christian world. In other words, *porcha* was demonic malefic magic by another name.

⁵⁶ *Slovar' russkogo iazyka XI–XVII vv.* (see note 18 above), s.v. *portiti*, gives a 1679 reference to shamans (evidently in a Finnic area of Russia) causing *porcha* with demonic help. Dal', *Slovar'*, s.v. *portit'*, states that a practitioner in *porcha* causes harm by magic spells or the Evil Eye.

As soon as this difference between malefic and non-malefic was legally defined in the new military code in terms of demonic or non-demonic, the accusations in depositions and trials were immediately phrased in the new terminology (although the circumstantial details of the accusation, for example, possession of herbs and roots and *tetradki*, 'whispering' and so on, were often the same as in the sixteenth- or seventeenth-century cases). The words had changed, but the essential perception of the distinction between malefic and non-malefic magic had not. One should add that in the Holy Roman Empire the *Constitutio Carolina*, already mentioned, also made the distinction only between malefic and non-malefic magic, and this too was later interpreted as meaning demonic and non-demonic.⁵⁷ It is also worth noting that Peter, or his administrators, may well have had second thoughts about the witchcraft provisions of the military code: in the code of naval law, the *Morskoi ustav* of 1720 (which was compiled from contemporary French, English, Swedish and Dutch naval regulations),⁵⁸ the legislation against magic has slipped to chapter four, omits the references to gun-spells, satanism and employing magicians, and associates magic with idolatry, superstition and blasphemy. The 'interpretation' of this law nevertheless still states that burning is to be the normal punishment of black magicians, poisoners and blasphemers.⁵⁹ This law, however, seems not to have been invoked in recorded witchcraft trials.

Whether or not this change in terminology also explains the absence (with one exception) of references to the demonic pact in court cases before Peter's law, and its subsequent (but not very common) appearance, is a moot point. As has been already shown, Russians were certainly familiar with the notion of the demonic pact and its connection with magic long before the eighteenth century.

V

From the published records, it would appear that in the seventeenth century there were a hundred or so court cases in which accusations of magic featured (Kivelson gives a figure of 136 accused witches). They took place in Moscow and a variety of provincial centres; the records of most of them are fragmentary. Some involved suspected attempts on the life of the Tsar, his wife or his intended wife, and are similar to the

⁵⁷ H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562–1684*, Stanford, CA, 1972, p. 23.

⁵⁸ See Claes Peterson, *Peter the Great's Administrative and Judicial Reforms: Swedish Antecedents and the Process of Reception*, Stockholm, 1979, p. 406. This book also deals with the *Voinskii artikul*, but there is no discussion of the witchcraft provisions.

⁵⁹ *Pamiatniki russkogo prava*, 8, Moscow, 1961, p. 485.

accusations known from the sixteenth century.⁶⁰ Although no very clear pattern of the status of the persons accused can be discerned, apart from the fact that about half were peasants, of the non-peasant component there is a noticeable presence of persons connected with Church or state, and a prominent number of foreigners. Foreigners were always regarded with fear and suspicion in Muscovy — Muslims, Catholics and Protestants were all heretics and characterized by an otherness often perceived as diabolical. And we may note that, to judge from the literary evidence such as that of Kurbskii already quoted, Finns, Karelians, Tartars and Gypsies often really were the professional, often itinerant, magicians consulted by Russians.

The list of cases given in Zguta's article which involved the sovereign and his court can be expanded:

In 1647, in the reign of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, a peasant named Simon Danilov, with the complicity of the boyars Semen and Ivan Danilov, was accused of using magical love spells on Prince Waldemar of Denmark and Princess Irina Mikhailovicha.⁶¹

On 22 April 1670, Artamon Matveev, a senior army commander, was accused of attempting to influence the Tsar's choice of bride by sorcery.⁶²

In 1671, one of the Tsaritsa's serving women, Marfa Timofeevna, was accused of stealing some salt and a mushroom which had been prepared for her mistress. When observed she had spilled the salt. Although she confessed to stealing the salt and mushroom, which she said she wanted to eat herself, she was tortured by strappado and then by fire, but confessed to nothing else. It is clear that this was an attempt to discover whether malefic magic or poisoning were intended, and whether or not she had accomplices.⁶³ (Fears of poisoning at court continued into the eighteenth century, when Peter the Great had his recently deceased Scottish physician Erskine [Areskin] opened up to see if he had been poisoned. Peter's scientific curiosity and peculiar sense of humour — Erskine was at one time popularly supposed to have tried to poison Peter — no doubt also played a part.)

In 1675, Prince F. F. Kurakin was accused of harbouring a witch, an old blind woman called Fen'ka. She confessed to witchcraft under torture and died.⁶⁴

In 1689–90, in an enquiry into an alleged plot on the life of the young Tsar Peter, Prince V. V. Golitsyn and Silvester Medvedev were accused of astrology and magic to achieve their ends. Golitsyn was

⁶⁰ Zguta, 'Witchcraft Trials', pp. 1192–204.

⁶¹ Russkii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (hereafter RGADA), fond 6, ed. khr. 3.

⁶² Philip Longworth, *Alexis, Tsar of All the Russias*, London, 1984 (hereafter *Alexis*), p. 199.

⁶³ RGADA, fond 6, ed. khr. 7.

⁶⁴ Longworth, *Alexis*, p. 221.

accused of asking a Polish wizard to prophesy whether or not he would marry the Regent Sofia, and of keeping a peasant sorcerer in his bathhouse to prepare love potions which would ensure Sofia's love;⁶⁵ and Iuda Boltin, an associate of the leader of the alleged conspiracy, the *dumnyi d'iak* Fedor Shaklovitii, was accused of sprinkling herbs and roots where the Tsar would walk.⁶⁶

Zguta found only one case, in 1663, in which the demonic pact was reported to be involved. This document, which was produced in court as having been found in the possession of the accused, included the passage: 'I renounce our creator Christ God, the Church of God, the Most Holy Liturgy, Vespers, Matins, and all godliness, my father, my mother, my family and ancestors, and I swear allegiance to Satan and his beloved servants.'⁶⁷ This, which Zguta says resembles an oath, is in fact typical of later demonic spell formulas (cf. the Koz'min case of 1731 below) and is further evidence that the demonic pact was definitely known before the eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century, the Synodal court dealt with some sixty cases of witchcraft and superstition, and the number of cases dealt with in lower ecclesiastical and criminal courts ran into hundreds.⁶⁸ Indeed, in the episcopal oath of 1716, all bishops had to ensure that superstition was not practised in their dioceses, and in Peter's *Ecclesiastical Regulation* (1721), reinforced later by an *ukaz* of Empress Anna in 1737, all bishops and abbots were obliged, under threat of trial for negligence, to send biannual reports to the Synod of any occurrences of witchcraft or superstition which became known to them.⁶⁹

In one such report, the pious but naive Bishop of Suzdal' stated despairingly that he was unable to stem the rising tide of black magic, in particular the cursing of births and weddings, even in his own household. Most bishops were more politic, and, evidently deciding to let ubiquitous customs well alone, sent in bland reports that all was well in their dioceses.⁷⁰

Let us now take a few eighteenth-century examples, mostly from the church court of the Holy Synod, in which specific demonic reference is made:

⁶⁵ See Lindsey A. J. Hughes, *Russia and the West: The Life of a Seventeenth-Century Westernizer Prince Vasil' Vasil'evich Golitsyn (1643-1714)*, Newtonville, MA, 1984, pp. 80-88.

⁶⁶ *Rozysknye dela o Fedore Shaklovitom i ego soobshchnikakh*, ed. A. N. Truvorov, 4 vols, St Petersburg, 1885-93, III, cols 1235-71.

⁶⁷ Zguta, 'Witchcraft Trials', p. 1204, quoting Novombergskii, *Koldovstvo* (see note 7 above).

⁶⁸ I. B. Smilianskaia, 'Doneseniia 1754g. v Sinod suzdal'skogo episkopa Porfiriiia "Iakoby vo grade Suzdale koldovstvo i volshebstvo umnozhiilos"' (hereafter 'Doneseniia 1754g.') in N. N. Pokrovskii (ed.), *Khristianstvo i tserkov' v Rossii: Feodal'nogo perioda. Materialy*, Novosibirsk, 1989, pp. 254-60 (p. 255).

⁶⁹ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 45 vols, St Petersburg, 1830, I, no. 7450.

⁷⁰ Smilianskaia, 'Doneseniia 1754g.' p. 256, note 9.

In 1723, Ivan Kraskov, a retired soldier of the Vyborg Regiment, was found to possess suspicious booklets and letters, wooden fortune-telling dice, herbs and roots. He claimed under interrogation that he had found the documents on Vasil'ev Island in St Petersburg and inherited the dice from his nephew, also a soldier. He had used the dice for two years to foretell his own domestic needs, health and time of death. He had learned the art from his cousin, a horse-doctor, and had never told fortunes for anyone else. The herbs too were for his own exclusive use. He denied charges of idol-worship, blasphemy, black magic, putting spells on guns and communing with the Devil (that is, the list of offences in article one of the military code). The regimental doctor gave evidence that the herbs and roots were of genuine medical value and nothing to do with malefic magic. Ivan was nevertheless sentenced to run the gauntlet six times and then do elaborate public penance.⁷¹

Another case in 1723 involved a 'false holy fool' called Vasilii, aged twenty, who was accused of murder, rape, making the sign of the cross with only two fingers (that is, the schismatic Old Believer practice), *eretichestvo* (literally heresy, but probably magic), having devils at his command, of whom the chief was called Herod, and whom he employed to jam watermills (such malfunctions were commonly ascribed to witchcraft because demons were popularly supposed to live in mill-races) and to bring treasure from Greece, Turkey and Sweden. Instead of throwing out this extraordinary farrago, the synodal court referred the case to the Iustits-kollegiia (Ministry of Justice), not because of the murder and rape but because of the accused's 'wizardry and having devils'.⁷²

In 1731, in the reign of Empress Anna, the deacon Stefan Koz'min of Chernigov Cathedral had been found in possession of magic books which included instructions for calling up devils: you must remove your cross and crush it under your right heel, remove your belt, deny Christ, the Virgin, the Apostolic Church, the apostles, the twelve great feasts of the Church and your own parents. The devils summoned included Cheremis, Crimean, Saxon and other devils from overseas, with names such as Veliger, Has, Herod, Aspid, Basilisk, Enarei, Semen, Indik and Khalei. One of the spells ran: 'Balaam, Valgel and Galilei(!), cure the servant of God N of this illness, Amen, Amen, Amen'.⁷³

About the same time, Il'ia Chovpilo, the servant of a colonel, was accused of writing, in his own blood, a thirty-year pact with the 'prince of devils'. The pact, a written document drawn up in proper legal style

⁷¹ *Opisanie dokumentov i del, khraniashchikhsia v arkhive sv. pr. Sinoda*, 50 vols, St Petersburg, 1848–1914, III (1723), cols 11–13.

⁷² *Ibid.*, III, col. 175.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, X (1730), cols 693–94, 1306–07.

(and we may note that elements of the legal formulas used in Muscovite petitions are not uncommon in spells), was produced in evidence.⁷⁴

In 1740, Iakov Iarov, evidently a professional *koldun*, was accused of witchcraft. In his possession were found roots, herbs, bones, spells, books of divination and a dictionary. He was alleged to have told fortunes using dice and the Psalter. Under torture he admitted denying Christ and calling on Satan. He admitted knowing another wizard in Simbirsk. His wife said that he used to turn the icons to face the wall, wore no cross or icon, refused to wash, and when she was pregnant said: 'If it is a boy, give it to the Devil'. The case was heard in 1740, but by an administrative error the wizard had already been put to death by burning four years earlier in 1736.⁷⁵

In 1770, in the reign of Catherine II, a certain state peasant in the remote Altai region, Artemii Sakalov, was arrested on suspicion of being a schismatic and was further denounced under the 'slovo i delo' procedure. After interrogation by a church court he was sent on to the provincial chancery of Siberia for investigation of the political charges. These were found to be baseless, but he was sent back to the church court because the interrogation had brought to light a series of religious misdemeanours which the accused himself had written down, before his arrest, in a private list of sins. These included details of banditry, murder, arson, robbing churches and pagan graves, dealing with the Devil, making magic spells by invoking the Devil (whom he called father) and three of the ancient gods of the Slavs: Perun (in fact the Slav god of thunder but whom the court notes identify as a Jewish heretic!), Vikhor' and Koliada. He also interpreted dreams, and used beans and the Psalter for divination.⁷⁶

It is very noticeable that most of the accused and accusers in cases such as these are, as in the seventeenth century, male persons often in the employ of the state or the Church, and that the accusations were as likely as not to be brought under military law, the 'slovo i delo gosudarevo' provision of denunciation for treason or canon law, and that the questioning invites the accused to implicate others.⁷⁷ The case of schismatics was ambiguous because from the time of Peter the Great the Church became a department of state, and since most of the

⁷⁴ Ibid., col. 529.

⁷⁵ Ibid., xxix (1740), cols 331–33.

⁷⁶ See N. N. Pokrovskii, 'Ispoved' altaiskogo krestianina' in *Pamiatniki kul'tury: Novye otkrytiia. Pismennost', iskusstvo, arkhologiiia. Ezhegodnik 1978*, Leningrad, 1979, pp. 49–57.

⁷⁷ Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, London, 1976, pp. 10–14, notes that many of the earlier witchcraft trials in Western Europe had a political character. Christina Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion* (see note 16 above), pp. 40–41, drawing on both Kieckhefer and Zguta, observes that the political colouring of the accusations during the 'Time of Troubles' suggests that the political use of witchcraft charges was a normal early stage in the growth of witch-hunting. This may perhaps be true, but the pattern of trials in Russia in which witchcraft figures does not actually support this contention.

schismatics regularly denounced the sovereign as the Antichrist, and the symbols of the state (coins, stamps, passports and so on) as the mark of the Devil, they were in fact regarded as a political as well as an ecclesiastical problem. The same is true of those, often clerics and soldiers, who were accused of making 'false prophecies'. The accusations, however bizarre, were usually supported by evidence (most commonly the possession of herbs and roots, apocryphal text-amulets such as the *Dream of the Virgin* or popular spells); diabolism, as we have seen, could also be involved.

VI

The evident preponderance of males in the cases described above brings me conveniently to the second topic of this article: why were more men tried for witchcraft in Russia than women, and do the probable reasons for this throw any light on the opposite case in most of the rest of Europe?

In fact, the papers of the important Oxford conference on early modern witchcraft published in 1990 have demonstrated that the Russian pattern is not as exceptional as normally claimed.⁷⁸ It is clear that in Iceland and the Baltic region men were prominent among the accused at witchcraft trials. In Iceland witches were typically male;⁷⁹ in Finland and Estonia some 60 per cent of those accused of witchcraft were men, often professional village magicians.⁸⁰ These are all areas which shared with Russia a tradition of male magicians, often professional, and often deriving to a greater or lesser degree from shamanism.

But here too in Russia the nature of the legal system plays a crucial role. Just as the new legal definition of demonic and non-demonic magic in the military code of 1716 immediately increased the amount of evidence of demonic magic offered in court cases, so the fact that this definition was made in the code of *military* law, together with the increase in the number of men permanently under arms in Peter's reign, or in the expanded quasi-military civil administration, immediately increased the number of soldiers and state servants accused of witchcraft. And here we should remember that Peter's vast standing

⁷⁸ Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, Oxford, 1990 (hereafter *Early Modern European Witchcraft*).

⁷⁹ Kirsten Hastrup, 'Iceland: Sorcerers and Paganism' in *ibid.*, pp. 383–401.

⁸⁰ Maia Madar, 'Estonia I: Werewolves and Poisoners' in Ankarloo and Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, pp. 257–72. In another article in the same volume, the figure in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Finland is put at about half male, at some times more than this: see Antero Heikkinen and Timo Kervinen, 'Finland: The Male Domination' in *ibid.*, pp. 319–38.

army, and its successors, was a national army of peasant conscripts who had to serve for twenty-five years, an uneducated, closed, and often bored and disgruntled community in which superstitious rumours and practices were a constant source of concern to the government well into the nineteenth century. In fact, a book called *Pis'ma k voïnam* ('Letters to the Troops'), published in 1831 and intended to combat superstition in the army, is one of the most informative source books for the magical beliefs and practices of its period.⁸¹

Similarly, the fact that, before Peter, the main legal provisions which dealt with magic and witchcraft were ecclesiastical law or edicts designed to protect the person of the tsar meant that the other main categories of accused persons were the clergy, typically the minor village clergy or those associated with them, and members of the tsar's court or administration. When women were involved it was by association with the same categories; they were as often as not the wives of soldiers or clergy, or in some way connected with the court or major figures of state.

In the case of the court of the Holy Synod set up by Peter, it is not surprising that many of the cases involved the clergy, since it was one of the few areas where the Church could still claim some jurisdiction. And in 1722, the Synod obtained Peter's confirmation that it had jurisdiction in cases relating to marriage, blasphemy, heresy and *vol'shebnye dela* (lit. 'magical matters' — a single specific term corresponding to witchcraft was, and still is, lacking).⁸² And indeed the Synod had work to do, because it is very clearly the case that the clergy in Russia, both monastic and parochial, played a large part in the magical practices of the people,⁸³ just as it did in other parts of Europe, including England. By way of comparison, consider Keith Thomas's observation that, in England, 'Friars and chaplains were invariably involved in the political conspiracies of the fifteenth century which made any use of magical aids. It is a striking feature of the sorcery cases recorded in the early sixteenth century that the participants so often included a priest.'⁸⁴ And some parallel could perhaps also be drawn with the significant proportion of ecclesiastics among those accused of witchcraft in heresy trials in Italy by the Roman Inquisition.⁸⁵

⁸¹ A. Mälov, *Pis'ma k voïnam*, St Petersburg, 1831.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁸³ This is too large a subject to be dealt with in detail here. I content myself with mentioning the admonitions to the clergy on this matter in the Stoglav Council of 1551, and a survey by Speranskii of privately-owned manuscript florilegia in the eighteenth century from which it can be seen that of the four categories of owner — peasants, clergy, merchants, the minor service class and the military — only the clergy possessed 'magical' texts: see M. N. Speranskii, *Rukopisnye sborniki XVIII veka*, Moscow, 1963, pp. 86–92.

⁸⁴ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 274.

⁸⁵ See John Tedeschi, 'Inquisitorial Law and the Witch' in Ankarloo and Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft* (see note 78 above), pp. 83–118 (p. 85).

Another key factor must also be borne in mind: until as late as the nineteenth century, there was no single coherent and codified legal system in Russia, and before the late eighteenth century there was no academic law or legal profession or law courts; essentially law was the administration of the country by edict of the tsar as interpreted by the tsar's officials. Indeed, the attempts at a codification of national law in Muscovy, the *Sudebniki* of 1497 and 1550 and the *Ulozhenie* of 1649, were a mixture of canon law of Byzantine origin, rules for administrative procedure and political or economic statements about the relationship of the tsar, the nobility and the rest of the people. Nevertheless, even in this situation, canon law was a separate system. In the acts of the 1551 *Stoglav* council mentioned above — a church council in fact summoned by Ivan the Terrible to deal with specific abuses (apparently listed by the Tsar himself) in the Church and in the popular religious practices of Russians — one of the few Russian documents to list current popular vices, superstitions and abuses of religion, the specified punishments for practising magic or owning magic books were purely ecclesiastical (excommunication or, revealingly, suspension from clerical duties). Comparison with law other than canon law at this point is also revealing. Ivan's attempt to codify and regulate the administration of justice, the *Sudebnik*, drawn up in the previous year and submitted to the Stoglav Council for approval, has no mention of witches, magic or superstitious practices. A later semi-official version of 1589, probably adapted for the free peasant (*chernososhnye*) communities of northern Russia,⁸⁶ mentions witches (*vedun'ia*; in one copy *ved'ma*), but only in the context of specifying levels of compensation for 'offences against the honour' (*beschestie*) of the various categories of citizen, for which purpose they came at the bottom of the list with harlots!⁸⁷ Male magicians are not mentioned, nor is there any trace of any other concern with magic, superstition or poisoning. We have to conclude from this that female witches were at this time a distinct category in village communities, at least in northern Russia, and that although canon law and occasional ukazes from the tsar in particular circumstances might condemn magic and witchcraft and their practitioners, codified Muscovite law in the form of the *Sudebniki* of 1497, 1550 and 1589 mentions only female witches, and only in the context of their legal rights!

In the *Ulozhenie* of 1649, the areas of jurisdiction of church and civil courts are to some extent redefined; there is nothing explicit in it concerning witchcraft and magic, although it does introduce measures in chapter one against blasphemy and sacrilege. On the other hand,

⁸⁶ B. D. Grekov (ed.), *Sudebniki XV–XVI vekov*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1952, p. 9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 354, 384.

the first words of the first article of chapter two of the *Ulozhenie* (the chapter which deals with secular law, and specifically with crimes against the majesty, authority and well-being of the tsar) are: 'If anyone should have evil designs against the health of the Tsar'. The Russian legal historian Tel'berg has argued, with examples, that this in fact has witchcraft in mind, and death is prescribed as the penalty.⁸⁸ This does indeed seem very probable; sickness in the seventeenth century was often regarded as demonic in origin, or caused by magic or poisoning (which were scarcely distinguished). It would be extraordinary if the new code of law were to contain nothing on the subject, given the almost hysterical fear of witchcraft at the Russian court in the seventeenth century,⁸⁹ the nature of the oaths abjuring magic which the servants of the tsars and their wives had to swear,⁹⁰ earlier ukazes on the subject, and the fact that accusations in cases of witchcraft had so often a political colouring and were essentially treason trials. Moreover, chapter two of the *Ulozhenie* is taken in part from the Lithuanian Statute, which certainly contains penalties for witchcraft. As examples of the fear of witchcraft at court, even before Tsar Aleksei, we may quote the case of Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich's linen, which was taken to the river for laundering under lock and key in a trunk covered by a red cloth (red is often found as a protective colour against witchcraft or the Evil Eye, as in the more recent case of the CIA revelations about the colour and purpose of General Noriega's underpants), accompanied by a lady of the court to supervise the washing as a precaution against witchcraft.⁹¹ All members of the Tsaritsa's household had to swear not to make spells or keep herbs or roots. These, it was feared, might be sprinkled, with an appropriate spell, in the path of, or in the entrance to the homes of the victim.⁹² Indeed, the Russian experience goes some way to supporting the recent rather sweeping claim of Muchembled that 'witch-hunting is fundamentally not a religious but a political phenomenon'.⁹³

⁸⁸ G. G. Tel'berg, *Ocherki politicheskogo suda i politicheskikh prestuplenii v Moskovskom gosudarstve XVII veka* (= *Uchenye zapiski Imperatorskogo Moskovskogo universiteta. Otdel iuridicheskii*, vyp. 39), Moscow, 1912, pp. 67–68.

⁸⁹ Russia had, to a marked degree, one of Christine Lerner's preconditions for witchcraft persecution: a belief in witchcraft shared by the élite and the peasantry: see Lerner, *Enemies of God* (see note 16 above), p. 193.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*; see also L. I. Min'ko, *Sueveria i primety*, Minsk, 1975, p. 27, and J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 13 vols, Edinburgh, 1908–26, III, col. 466a.

⁹¹ Quoted in M. E. Zabelin, 'Sыsnye dela o vorozheiax i koldun'iax pri tsare Mikhaile Fedoroviche', *Kometa*, 1851, pp. 469–92 (p. 475).

⁹² For several cases, see L. V. Cherepnin, 'Iz istorii drevnerusskogo koldovstva XVII v.', *Etnografiia*, 8, 1929, no. 2, pp. 96–97.

⁹³ Robert Muchembled, 'Satanic Myths and Cultural Reality' in Ankarloo and Henning-sen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, pp. 139–60 (p. 160).

All these law codes and individual decrees could, in theory, be invoked in court, and sometimes were, right up to the legal reforms in the early nineteenth century. And the Synodal and other courts, in the absence of any single legal structure, could try accused persons under any of the laws. From the introduction of Peter's military law in 1716 onwards, we therefore have in Russia what would now seem distinctly odd, a *church* court administering *military* law in cases of heresy, blasphemy and witchcraft.

VII

Does this mean that there was no witchcraft or magic except in the Tsar's court, the Church and army, or that women were rarely involved? Certainly not. It is just that magic and authority are more likely to come into serious contact in those areas. And although written evidence on the subject is sparse before the seventeenth century, it is quite clear that magical practitioners of both sexes operated at all levels of society from the earliest historical times.

In fact, the vast territory of first Muscovite and then Imperial Russia was in many areas under-administered, and the majority of persons locally suspected of witchcraft would have been villagers, usually serfs, who were never taken to court but were dealt with by their neighbours or owners. For example, there are several accounts of persons being put to death for witchcraft in the Ukraine in the eighteenth century: in 1711, ten women were tried by ducking; in 1738, a landowner was beaten and burned to death and a woman under torture admitted to turning herself into a goat or a dog and killing people by invoking spirits; and in 1770, a Turk was dipped in tar and burned to death and a Uniate priest suspected of spreading plague by sorcery was buried alive. In all these cases it was popular fear, usually of epidemics associated in the popular mind with witchcraft, and not legal process, which led to the deaths.⁹⁴ It should be remembered, however, in these Ukrainian cases, that for much of the eighteenth century, the Russian-controlled areas of the Ukraine formerly in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were administered under an unsatisfactory mixture of legal systems (primarily the Lithuanian Statute, promulgated in 1566 and 1588, with some towns subject to Magdeburg Law). In 1767 the Russian governor of the Ukraine, anxious to control widespread superstitious practices, decided to enforce the letter of the Lithuanian Statute and had two women burned for witchcraft. He could do this in

⁹⁴ Antonovich, *Koldoustvo* (see note 14 above), pp. 18, 26; J. T. Alexander, *Bubonic Plague in Early Modern Russia*, Baltimore, MD, 1980, pp. 30, 107, 113.

the Ukrainian part of the empire because this sixteenth-century law made it locally possible.⁹⁵

The extra-legal kind of witch-hunting, especially in rural areas, continued into the nineteenth century both in Russia and elsewhere, and no doubt continues today. There were many cases, including the ducking of witches in the 1880s,⁹⁶ the burning of witches by peasants in 1879 (the local jury acquitted most of the perpetrators when they were brought to court and sentenced the rest to a church penance) and 1889 (in this case on a spit with the consent of her son!), a witch beaten to death in 1894, and male *kolduny* killed, sometimes for putting the Evil Eye on weddings, in 1879, 1880, 1888 and 1895.⁹⁷ In 1880, in the Penza *guberniia* alone, three alleged female witches were killed.⁹⁸ Sometimes courts at local levels could be involved — women were punished for witchcraft by beating in 1884 and 1886.⁹⁹

By the seventeenth century, the male magician, often called *koldun* and probably descended from the shamans of early Russia and its neighbouring Finnic peoples, was already, or perhaps always had been, an essential and indeed professional part of village life, in many places playing a more important role in village affairs than the parish priest. His best recorded role is the part he played in weddings; he had to supervise the bride's ritual bath and protect the wedding party from the hostile magic of alien witches and wizards.¹⁰⁰ These, if not guarded against, were widely believed to be able to turn whole wedding parties into werewolves (usually vegetarians, incidentally), and to make the bride break wind when she bowed during the wedding service. As recently as 1971, in the Vologda region, it is recorded that the *koldun* had to lead the bride to the ritual bath with a fishnet round his waist; then he was to beat her with birch twigs (the normal procedure in north Russian bath-houses) and recite a binding spell. He would then wipe the sweat from her body with a whole raw fish which was afterwards to

⁹⁵ For a succinct description of the legal situation in the Ukraine, see Zenon E. Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate 1760s-1830s*, Cambridge, MA, 1984, pp. 52-55, 86-88. For the incident of the burning of witches, see p. 118.

⁹⁶ A. A. Levenstim, 'Sueverie v ego otnoshenii k ugolovnomu pravu', *Zhurnal Ministerstva iustitsii*, 1897, 1, pp. 157-219 (pp. 204-05).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁰⁰ Although the role of the *koldun* in Russian weddings is frequently described in eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature, it is often completely ignored in accounts by later Soviet cultural anthropologists and folklorists and by Western scholars using them as sources. The same scholars sometimes even omit to mention that Russian weddings, for all their colourful folkloric elements, usually involved the Church.

be cooked and given to the groom to eat. Folklorists and cultural anthropologists will not find this difficult to interpret.¹⁰¹

The female magician does not have this role but may well be a midwife (*baba*, one of the words for woman in Russian, may also have both these narrower meanings, and, confusingly, can even mean a male magician), who had many specific magic duties connected with childbirth and child health, as well as sharing the role of the male magician as general healer, interpreter of dreams, provider of amulets, love potions, blessings and curses, spells and in particular counter-spells.¹⁰²

Both the male and female magicians have a real and a fictional existence, often in the form of 'one's own wizard' versus 'someone else's wizard'. The real existence I have outlined; the fictional existence is that of folk-tales, anecdote and popular belief, in which the magician is usually malignant, with fantastic powers, the ability to fly, change shape and summon demons. Robert Rowland, in a comparative study of European witch-beliefs, has stated that: 'The witches' attributes and behaviour mark them off from normal society, and the world of witches often constitutes a systematized structure of negation, an inversion of the world in which people who hold these beliefs live.'¹⁰³ Rowland did not consider any Russian evidence, but his statement comes close to the semiotic model of the Russian scholar B. A. Uspenskii, expounded in a series of books and articles, with the difference that while Rowland is speaking of behaviour merely imputed to witches, Uspenskii describes not only beliefs about magicians, but also known behaviour (or more often, in his terminology, 'anti-behaviour') of actual magicians in specific historical circumstances. Indeed, Uspenskii, and his late colleague Iurii Lotman and their associates in what has become known as the Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics, have found the history of Russian culture extremely amenable to analysis by means of binary

¹⁰¹ Margarita Mazo, '“We don't summon Spring in the Summer”': Traditional Music and Beliefs of the Contemporary Russian Village' in William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic (eds), *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*, Cambridge, 1991, p. 74.

¹⁰² For a picture of all the roles of the Russian midwife in the modern period, including her magic role, see T. A. Listova, 'Russian Rituals, Customs, and Beliefs Associated with the Midwife (1850–1930)' in Marjorie M. Balzer (ed.), *Russian Traditional Culture*, New York and London, 1992, pp. 122–45 (first published in Russian in 1989).

¹⁰³ Robert Rowland, '“Fantastical and Devilish Persons”': European Witch Beliefs in Comparative Perspective' in Ankarloo and Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, pp. 161–90 (p. 169).

oppositions such as: Russian–foreign; old–new; Orthodox–pagan/magical/heretical; ‘normal’ behaviour–‘anti-behaviour’.¹⁰⁴

In the case of the reputed powers of female witches, the influence of the West is definitely noticeable, in particular in the Ukraine and Belarus, which were for a long time under Polish rule and therefore subject not only to West Slavonic but also to Latin and Germanic influences. Female magicians seem rather more liable to be fictionalized in this way than their male counterparts, and both in folk-tales and in very many ethnographic accounts of local customs were thought to use flying ointment to fly up chimneys, to change into magpies, to hold their sabbath on Bare Mountain near Kiev,¹⁰⁵ to steal babies and so on. The accusation of baby-stealing and causing miscarriages is a good example of how the fictionalized characteristics of magicians merge with the characteristics of demons from earlier belief systems: the noontide witch-cum-demon who steals or kills children has a pedigree which extends from ancient Mesopotamia to modern Siberia.¹⁰⁶ According to the same popular sources, magicians of either sex could inherit their powers, learn them or acquire them by the demonic pact. By the nineteenth century in Russia they were all commonly supposed to owe their powers to the Devil, who would prolong their death agonies until they had touched someone and thereby created a new and involuntary partner with Satan.

VIII

After this necessarily hasty typology of Russian real and imagined practitioners of magic let us go back to the seventeenth century, when the fear of malefic magic was greatest in Russia, at least in court circles, and ask why there was not a greater anti-witch hysteria, as there was in adjacent countries, such as the mainly Catholic Poland and Protestant Sweden, and why, when there were court cases, women were less often accused than men.

¹⁰⁴ See, in particular, Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij, ‘The Role of Dual Models of Russian Culture (up to the End of the Eighteenth Century)’ in Lotman and Uspenskij, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture* (see note 27 above), pp. 3–35; Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij, ‘K semioticheskoj tipologii russkoj kul’tury XVIII veka’ in *Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii (1973): Khudozhestvennaia kul’tura XVIII veka*, Moscow, 1974, pp. 259–82; B. A. Uspenskij, ‘Tsar and Pretender’ (see note 27 above); B. A. Uspenskij, ‘Dualisticheskii kharakter russkoj srednevekovoi kul’tury (na materiale “Khozheniia za tri moria” Afanasiia Nikitina)’ in B. A. Uspenskij, *Izbrannye trudy. 1. Semiotika istorii, semiotika kul’tury*, 2nd edn, Moscow, 1996, pp. 381–432.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Dal’, *Slovar’*, s.v. *lisyi*.

¹⁰⁶ See M. Gaster, ‘Two Thousand Years of a Charm against the Child-Stealing Witch’, *Folklore*, 1900, pp. 129–62.

The answer is not, of course, simple or single, but the main points have, I think, already emerged in what I have written above. To summarize them:

1. No one in Russia had developed a sophisticated theology of witchcraft, or an appropriate terminology; indeed, the kind of theology which developed with Scholasticism in the West was entirely lacking. Canon law was fragmentary, and in Muscovy, at least, there were no colleges in which theological debate might take place.
2. There was in pre-Petrine Russia no tradition of esoteric scholarship seeking to unravel the mysteries of the ancients, such as developed in the Renaissance in Western Europe.
3. There was no politico-religious conflict on a par with the Reformation which might make the details of individual belief a matter of political loyalty. Which is not to say that most accusations of witchcraft were not motivated by politics or malice. Nevertheless, when there was an internal crisis of religion and cultural identity over the modernization of the Orthodox Church in the mid-seventeenth century under Patriarch Nikon (which led to the 'Old Believer' schism), and at the beginning of the eighteenth century under Peter the Great, this did coincide with the largest number of prosecutions involving evidence of malefic magic.
4. There was no coherent legal system under which witchcraft could be prosecuted. The laws applying to particular segments of the population more or less determined who was likely to be prosecuted. Accusations of malefic magic were, as often as not, simply part of a list of crimes imputed to someone who had actually been arrested after denunciation for treason or who was a social or political irritant in some other way or the victim of malice. And while denunciation for treason was not uncommon (the notorious *slovo i delo* provision), and had always to be investigated by the local authorities and reported to Moscow, there was no similar process before the eighteenth century by which the authorities were bound to investigate allegations of witchcraft. It is true that most interrogations of those accused of malefic magic, both before and after Peter's law, sought to establish where the suspect had learned his magic and whether or not he had taught anyone else, but there seem to have been no widespread denunciations in such cases of the kind which often set off witchcraft hysteria in parts of Western Europe.
5. Such law as there was rarely impinged on the bulk of the people, especially in the remoter areas, which could be far from even regional centres, and many weeks' travel from Moscow. When hysterical fear of witchcraft broke out in a rural area it usually had only local consequences and was not necessarily even properly recorded. In the

eighteenth century, under the episcopal oath introduced by Peter, bishops had the duty of reporting all cases of 'superstition' and most of them sent tactful 'nil' returns, despite abundant evidence of widespread recourse to magic, divination and witchcraft. From the eleventh century to the twentieth, there have been many cases of women and men, but more often women, being murdered by their fellow villagers or townsfolk for alleged witchcraft or the Evil Eye. This was usually at times of plague, cholera, drought or crop failure, all misfortunes for which the magical remedies, at least on the evidence of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practice, usually involved the participation of women (this point is made by Zguta). This kind of witch-hunting, especially in rural areas, continued even in the nineteenth century, both in Russia and elsewhere. Sometimes quasi-judicial assemblies at local levels could be involved — in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, for example, the *mir* and *obshchina*, the largely peasant communal units of administration which, though outside the formal legal system, nevertheless had local judicial functions but employed procedures and concepts of crime and evidence which owed more to traditional belief and rural practice than to the enacted law of the land. For example, one procedure was the *sud bozhii* or 'judgment of God', in which the accused had to swear on an icon while being scrutinized closely by those present for any twitch or change in demeanour which might be interpreted as divine condemnation. There are many cases of women being accused of *porcha*, usually as a result of trying to influence their husbands by magic.¹⁰⁷ Charges of *porcha* (*maleficium*) in the 1820s–1840s could be referred upwards from these commune courts into the formal legal system, as far as the courts of the *guberniia*.

It is at least possible that local extra-judicial punishments and executions were, on occasion, not so much punishment for *maleficium* as punishment for magical incompetence, just as wonder-working icons were often punished when they failed to perform miracles.¹⁰⁸ In some cases, these witch-murders were tacitly ignored by the authorities. The victims in these cases have sometimes been identified as people who looked odd or behaved oddly, that is, who might be thought to have the Evil Eye, rather than specifically identified professional magicians.

6. In a country in which, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was no real medical profession apart from the tsar's foreign physicians (who, incidentally, in the Muscovite period almost all doubled as astrologers and alchemists), the professional practitioners of

¹⁰⁷ See Minenko, *Russkaia krest'ianskaia obshchina*, pp. 151–53. Minenko also notes the significant fact that the accused were usually incomers to the area.

¹⁰⁸ See B. A. Uspenskii, *Filologicheskie razyskaniia v oblasti slavianskikh drevnostei. (Relikty iazychestva v vostochnoslavianskom kul'te Nikolaia Mirlikiiskogo)*, Moscow, 1982, pp. 114–16.

magic, both male and female, but predominantly male, established for themselves an essential and fairly open role in society in their real as opposed to their fictional *persona*. For the bulk of the population they were almost the only resort in time of illness or epidemic. There was no particular social reason, for most of the time, why they should be persecuted, and every reason why they should not, and for the most part the clergy chose not to oppose them; indeed, up to Peter the Great's church reforms, which effectively separated the clergy culturally from their flocks, the parish clergy could themselves often be involved in minor magic practices, such as allowing magic herbs and other magical objects to remain on the altar during the liturgy to enhance their power, reciting medical spells over sick parishioners, performing rain-making ceremonies, counteracting hostile spells or placating the various goblins which in Russian folk belief inhabited woods, rivers, bathhouses and barns.

IX

One extreme feminist view of the witchcraft persecutions in the West is that they are part of the unceasing struggle by men to dominate women. This implies either that witchcraft had no objective existence (a view shared by the early rationalist historians of the subject) or that witchcraft did exist and was a weapon employed by women in that same struggle. Whatever may be thought of such contentions by less ideologically committed historians, they clearly have little application in Russia, and still leave unresolved the historical problem of why persecutions should happen in one place rather than another, and at one time rather than another; and why, in other kinds of demonic misdemeanour, such as werewolf trials, or in accusations of heresy without a magical component, the accused were much more likely to be men.¹⁰⁹

The case of Russia, which was certainly no paradise for women but nevertheless killed fewer women than men for witchcraft as a result of formal judicial proceedings, and in which the evidence for demonic magic turns out, as we have seen, to be largely a question of (i) legal terminology, (ii) which sections of the population were most likely to be in contact with the law, and (iii) who in the real world was actually involved in magic and witchcraft, supports the perhaps banal conclusions that the prime factors determining why outbreaks of witch hysteria happened in certain places and not others, and at certain times

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, the evidence presented by Caroline Oates in 'Trials of Werewolves in the Franche-Comté in the Early Modern Period', PhD dissertation, University of London, 1993.

rather than others, are first of all differences in legal structures, terminology and practice, followed secondarily by differences in cultural history, local crisis situations and the tendency of societies to scapegoat vulnerable groups at times of stress.

Hugh Trevor-Roper, one of the initiators of the current historical interest in witchcraft trials, claimed that Orthodox Eastern Europe escaped the worst excesses of the witch craze because it had not read SS Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, whom he regarded as obsessively concerned with sex.¹¹⁰ It is true that these two great intellectual saints, who were so influential in the theology and philosophy of the West, were effectively unknown in Russia, although not entirely so in other parts of the Orthodox world. But the frequently expressed opinion that the alleged sexual hang-ups of Western man can be traced to these and other medieval theologians (as if the lusty common people, or even their parish priests, read theology, and as if other societies were free of sexual anxieties), and that this contributed to the hysterical misogyny occasionally seen in witchcraft trials, is facile. The penitentials of Russia contain exactly the same kind of preoccupation with the more imaginative kinds of sexual activity as do Western penitentials and are derived from the same sources — the early councils and synods of the Church, which were usually attempting to deal with specific current problems in the pagan world of late antiquity. Trevor-Roper would have been closer to the mark in the case of Russia if he had observed that Russia, for most of its history, lacked a coherent legal system, lawyers, scholars and theologians and centres of learning, and did not suffer the mixed blessings of the Renaissance or the Reformation. And, as John Tedeschi has demonstrated recently in a series of publications, those areas in which the Roman Inquisition (which certainly knew Augustine and Thomas Aquinas!) was responsible for witchcraft trials did *not* suffer the massive witch persecutions seen in other parts of Europe, mainly because the Inquisition had sophisticated lawyers who argued about the letter of the law, made provision for legal defence and excluded the use in evidence of denunciations made by a person accused of witchcraft.¹¹¹

This agrees well with the main contention of this article, that the history and terminology of the prevailing legal system, and the history and terminology of local beliefs, are crucial to the understanding of how a society deals with accusations of witchcraft, and that closer examination of the alleged exceptional case of Russia shows it to be less exceptional than has been claimed.

¹¹⁰ H. Trevor-Roper, 'The European Witch Craze' (see note 5 above), p. 186.

¹¹¹ See, in particular, John Tedeschi, 'Inquisitorial Law and the Witch' (see note 85 above). For the similar procedures of the Inquisition in Venice, see Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice, 1550–1650*, Oxford, 1989, esp. pp. 18–33.